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IMPROVED CHEROKEE ALPHABETS.

BY JAMES MOONEY.

The Cherokee syllabic alphabet, invented by Sequoya about 1823, made the Cherokees at once a literary people, and has probably contributed more than any other one thing to elevate them to the high position which they now occupy among the aboriginal tribes. The syllabary, however, has several defects which seriously impair its usefulness. A number of the characters are so nearly alike that they can scarcely be distinguished even in the most carefully written manuscript. There is no logical connection of characters denoting related sounds—as *tsa*, *tse*, *tsi*, etc.—and finally each character commonly requires several strokes in the making; and cannot be joined to the other characters of the word, thus rendering writing a slow and laborious task. Several attempts have been made to remedy these defects, notably by Father Morice and William Eubanks.

Father Morice, who is attached to a mission station at Stuart's Lake, in British Columbia, has elaborated an alphabet or syllabary on the plan of the Déné and Cree alphabets, invented for those tribes by the missionaries in the northwest. In this system all related sounds are represented by the same character, in different positions or with the addition of a dot or stroke. Thus, \vee is *hu*; inverted \wedge it is *ha*; with the apex to the left < it is *ha*; to the right > it is *hū*, while a dot or a short stroke in the angle makes it respectively *hi* or *he*. The plan is simple, and the characters are readily distinguishable, but unfortunately not adapted to word combination in manuscript. The inventor says, “Just think of it! When you know the value of *s* and *h* you merely learn *ten* signs with their *four* positions and a few logical modifications—distinguishable at sight—and in one evening you know how to read!”

The other alphabet, invented by William Eubanks, a Cherokee mixed-blood, of Tahlequah, Indian Territory, is a system of shorthand and well adapted to rapid manuscript writing. By means of dots variously placed, fifteen basal characters, each made with a single stroke, either straight or curved, represent correctly every sound in the language. Mr. Eubanks is enthusiastic over his system, which is the result of much close study on his part, and is endeavoring to promote its adoption by the distribution of printed copies at his own expense among those who read the language.

Notwithstanding the evident advantages of either system over the

old one, it is unlikely that any change will be adopted by the tribe. When Sequoya's alphabet was invented, seventy years ago, the Gulf States, the Ohio valley, and the Great West were all Indian country, and the Indian languages had a commercial and even a political importance. Now, all this is changed. There are to-day in the Cherokee Nation nearly two thousand white citizens, while those with one-half or more of white blood constitute by far the majority of the tribe. Many of the leading men of the nation are unable to speak the language, while the legislative and court proceedings, the national records, and the national education are all in English, and the full-blood, who cannot speak English, is fast becoming a rarity. The Cherokees are rapidly becoming white men, and when the last full-bloods discard their old alphabet—which they love because it is Indian—they will adopt that of the ruling majority.

A KIOWA MESCAL RATTLE.

BY JAMES MOONEY.

While making ethnologic investigations among the Kiowa on the upper Red river in Indian Territory the writer obtained, among other things, a peculiarly symbolic rattle used in the mescal-eating ceremony. The rattle is diminutive, being only about nine inches long, exclusive of the buckskin fringes, which are ornamented with beads and the feathers of the bluebird. These feathers, as also some of another species at the top of the rattle, have a symbolic meaning in connection with the mescal rite. The gourd of the rattle is about the size of a small hen egg, being the ordinary gourd commonly used for this purpose, and is covered with carvings symbolic of the rite, which seems to be a worship of the elements or the powers of nature.

Radiating downward for a short distance from the top of the rattle are a number of lines, painted green, representing the falling rain, green or blue being the symbolic color of water. On opposite sides of the rattle are two zigzag red lines, running the whole length of the gourd. These represent the mescal songs, the same device of zigzag lines being frequently used in the Kiowa pictograph system to represent songs, the idea, perhaps, being to indicate the rising and falling of the voice in singing. In one of the divisions formed by the parallel lines is the figure of a flower with a bird pecking at it, representing the mescal and a bird (not identified) which is said